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“I Shall Speak Out Against This and Other Evils’:
African American Activism in the British Isles 1865-1903’.

Abstract

Despite the onset of legal abolition in 1865, African American activists continued to be in the vanguard for defying transatlantic white supremacy in both the U.S. and the U.K. To irreversibly fulfil the failed promises of abolition, black women and men followed in the footsteps of their activist forebears to campaign and educate transatlantic audiences on global racism and the fact that, U.S. slavery had never actually died. Based on newly excavated written and oral testimonies, this article examines the broad motivations of why African Americans travelled to the British Isles post-1865 and published their narratives into the early twentieth century.

Key Words: Slavery, abolition, African American activism, postbellum, transatlantic, post-1865, Britain and Ireland.

In London in 1898, African American activist D.E. Tobias published a ground-breaking pamphlet entitled *Freed but Not Free*. A searing indictment on the convict-lease system, Tobias vowed that:

So long as I know my right hand from my left, and God gives me the strength of voice, and I preserve the use of my pen, I shall speak out against this and other evils which are eating the life and manhood out of my race in the States.¹

Echoing Frederick Douglass, who had declared on British soil that American slavery was a ‘cancer...eating into [the nation’s] vitals’,² Tobias was prepared to dedicate his life to the black liberation struggle and cure the racist disease that afflicted the United States. Despite the end of the bloody Civil War and the onset of legal abolition in 1865, black activists continued to be in the vanguard for defying transatlantic white supremacy in postbellum society, and they implored the public to understand not only that U.S. abolition was a failure, but also how the roots of American slavery ran deep. Instead of being corroded by the glorious promise of the Civil War’s end, these roots became deeply embedded in American soil.

To exorcise such influences and irreversibly fulfil the promise of abolition, African American women and men such as Benjamin William Brown, Hallie Quinn Brown, Nelson Countee, Isaac Dickerson, Bishop Walter Hawkins, Josiah Henson, Reverend John Hector, James Johnson, Thomas Johnson, Reverend J.C. Price, Amanda Smith Lewis Smith, D.E. Tobias, and Ida B. Well followed in the footsteps of their activist forebears to raise awareness and educate transatlantic audiences on global racism. Additionally, they campaigned around the fact that, contrary to popular belief, U.S. chattel slavery had never actually died. Instead,

its foul spirit had mutated and evolved into practices such as lynching and the convict lease system, which preserved the legacies of centuries of oppression. Taking the literary and oratorical testimonies of the aforementioned African Americans at its heart, and their political motivations for travelling to the British Isles, this article argues that 1865 should be a fluid boundary, not a cliff-edge or stopping point to the story of transatlantic abolition. We should refocus our attention *beyond* 1865 to explore how slavery and its international legacies continued to affect not only black communities in the U.S. but also how and *why* this spurred further activist lecturing tours to the British Isles.

While some scholars have framed 1865 as the end of the slave narrative tradition, other historians such as William Andrews and Frances Foster have highlighted the sheer volume of postbellum writings by formerly enslaved individuals, and their repeated calls for equality in a nation suffering from slavery's brutality.³ Andrews is one of the few scholars to comprehensively analyze post-Civil War activism and charts the legacy of slavery specifically through slave narratives. Between 1866-1901, fifty-four narratives were published in the United States by formerly enslaved individuals: most of whom were ministers and teachers, with large numbers of women, who published more narratives than in the antebellum period.⁴ Before the Civil War, the majority of slave memoirs were published in large cities such as New York, Boston and London, where formerly enslaved individuals took advantage of antislavery networks and publishers who were keen to distribute such works. Post-war narratives published in Harrisburg, St Louis, and Milwaukee reflected the geographical migrations and movements of African Americans.⁵ They also betrayed shared tendencies as they 'yielded to portrayals of slavery and racism as an intertwined national disease infecting North as well as South after the Civil War.'⁶ Additionally, David Blight has remarked that the emphasis within these narratives is typically 'more about a rise to success for the individual and progress for the race as a whole.' Ultimately, post-Civil War narratives

aimed not ‘to catalogue the horrors of slavery, but to use memoir as a marker of racial uplift and respectability in the age of Jim Crow.’⁷

However, Andrews and Blight’s seminal research applies to the United States. Building on their ground-breaking scholarship, and based on hundreds of written and oral testimonies I have newly excavated, this article examines the broad motivations for African American sojourns to the British Isles between 1865-1914. At least twelve postbellum slave narratives, biographies or autobiographies which have been largely ignored by scholars were published during this period, and the real figure is likely to be much higher.⁸ Some of these missions, including the narratives and memoirs they published as a result, mirrored their U.S. counterparts and the motives that Andrews and Blight suggest. However, embarking on a transatlantic tour was a deliberate political statement, a demand for international equality and a plea for British audiences to recognize, help or support black women and men in some concrete capacity. In the face of white terrorism and inequality, their missions could not solely be about racial uplift when they had opportunities to expose racism on an international platform: black activists made the journey to Britain to do justice to their conviction that racism – the cancer that was eating the nation’s vitals – had never been cured.⁹ Unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe or other white abolitionists in general, African Americans did not have the luxury to retire after legal abolition was declared. Their entire lives were blighted by slavery and racism, and their restless and relentless activism stands as a testament to their commitment to challenge white supremacy in all of its forms, on both sides of the Atlantic, and beyond what is typically associated with transatlantic antebellum African American activism. While antebellum slave narratives and speeches distinctly served the purpose of abolition, post-war testimony – particularly in oratorical form – was specifically shaped around abolition’s broken promises. African Americans built on their predecessors and

created their own ideal of U.S. society, and continued to denounce white supremacy, challenge Lost Cause narratives and white domestic terrorism.

Post-1865 black activist missions to the British Isles can largely be placed in two categories: religious and temperance campaigns (which included charitable causes like raising money for freed-people, churches or black communities in general) and challenging the direct legacies of slavery (such as lynching and the convict lease system). It should be said first and foremost, that these categories were often interlinked, as few black activists who lectured on temperance refused to discuss slavery or critique racism. After all, British audiences still possessed an insatiable desire to learn about the Old South and many believed the ‘story of the American negro would someday be regarded as the romance of our age’.¹⁰ As a result African Americans shared their own testimony or the testimony of others to remind the transatlantic public of the evils of slavery and expose its connections to contemporary society. However, as was the case before 1865, if African Americans arrived with specific missions to win support from British audiences, they were likely to be more successful.

Some of these activists conducted extensive tours in the British Isles, while others appear only fleetingly in the Victorian press and vanish just as suddenly. In Sheffield in 1870 for example, Nelson Countee gave a lecture on ‘the Condition of the African Race’, which ‘excited much interest by recounting his experiences as a slave and the mode in which he made his escape’.¹¹ In 1878, Amanda Smith preached at the Christian Convention in Keswick, and in 1888, M.H. Garnet Barboza, the principle of the Garnet Memorial School in Liberia and daughter of Henry Highland Garnet, lectured to raise funds for the education of young women in Africa.¹²

Frederick Douglass, a trailblazing reformer who had set the stage for many subsequent campaigners, returned to Britain in 1886 with his second white wife, Helen Pitts

Douglass, to embark on a European honeymoon. While the aim of their visit was not political, Douglass capitalized on the opportunity to speak about the condition of African Americans in the U.S. and remained ‘hopeful’ that black Americans would rise and progress despite the many obstacles they faced.¹³

Douglass’ honeymoon aside, the majority of postbellum transatlantic lecturing tours to the British Isles were often more localized and sporadic, with no fixed duration or utilization of a specific event. There were few international incidents to take advantage of compared to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852, or the Civil War. Instead, activists visited the British Isles to raise money for black churches, university colleges, temperance societies, or anti-lynching campaigns. There were few ‘grand tours’ or exhausting lecturing schedules that covered nearly every major city in the country. This was perhaps a result of the breakdown of relationships with antislavery networks, which, after 1865 were difficult to rely on. In stark contrast, during the antebellum period, African Americans utilized their friendships with abolitionists, relationships with newspaper editors and correspondents, and connections to high-profile or aristocratic figures to maximize their impact on the public. While former antislavery activists continued to agitate for reform, the antislavery networks that held transatlantic abolition together waned.¹⁴ Yet, it was necessary for African Americans to maintain the networks they could and act in the face of white domestic terrorism, disenfranchisement and Jim Crow laws.

Looking first at previous black activist missions to the British Isles before the 1860s, this essay then focuses on the transatlantic tours of Lewis Smith, Reverend J.C. Price, Bishop Walter Hawkins, Benjamin William Brown, Ida B. Wells, Hallie Quinn Brown and D.E. Tobias. The lost story of postbellum transatlantic activism has confined some of these figures to historical oblivion, but their unwavering dedication to the promise of abolition should

resound and ultimately change our conception of antislavery activism. Hawkins said in 1891 that ‘Slavery had never been removed from the United States...and existed there’ at that very moment.¹⁵ For Hawkins, the condition of African Americans was no less dire or urgent than it had been during antebellum period, and he was not alone in his belief that black lives were, quite literally, at stake.

‘Oh, Slavery is a Terrible Thing!’: African American Activists on British Soil

During the mid-nineteenth century in one of transatlantic abolition’s most extraordinary chapters, African American activists, many of whom were formerly enslaved, travelled to the British Isles to share their testimony on U.S. slavery and racism. As Manisha Sinha states, black women and men ‘acted as abolition’s ambassadors’ with the immediate result that travelling to the British Isles ‘became a rite of passage for many, who experienced their trips abroad as ‘liberating sojourns’ away from the all-encompassing pall of American racism’.¹⁶ From the 1830s to the late 1860s, black women and men organized extensive lecturing tours to raise money for antislavery societies, for enslaved people to legally free themselves or their family members from slavery; while others sought employment or permanent residence. They made an indelible mark on British society; they wrote slave narratives, and held lectures in locations both central and remote, from famous venues in London as well as in taverns, theatres and churches in the smallest fishing villages along the coast of Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales.¹⁷

Audrey Fisch has estimated that 20 slave narratives were published in the British Isles by 1850, reflecting not only the consistent and determined activism of African Americans, but also an ‘insatiable’ obsession from white British audiences who were keen to hear their lectures.¹⁸ African American testimony was thus central to the transatlantic abolitionist

movement, and their British lecturing tours were often conduits for future success in the U.S. The career of Frederick Douglass is a prime example: his 1845-1847 British sojourn made him into an international celebrity and provided experience for a young orator to hone his skills.¹⁹

After the Civil War, the consolidation of Jim Crow laws, the convict lease system and lynching in the U.S. spurred waves of black activism as well as frustrated attempts to invoke historical memory and remind audiences of slavery's brutality. In 1873, William Still wrote that 'the future looks very dark to me for the colored man both North + South'. He believed his book *The Underground Railroad Records* (1872), which was dedicated to the hundreds of formerly enslaved individuals who had fled the horrors of slavery via the Underground Railroad, would be a 'grand monument...to the heroism of the late Slaves' and offer such 'encouragement and credit to the colored men of this country'.²⁰ Twenty years later, newspaper editor John Thompson declared that slavery could never be forgotten, particularly for black women and the 'agonizing groans of mothers' who still mourned their lost children. Hence, many formerly enslaved individuals or their children felt duty-bound to share their testimony, often travelling abroad to do so as they published their writings and memoirs.²¹

British public fascination with the U.S. South did not cease after the onset of legal abolition: diaries and travel accounts recording experiences in the South were published in the British press, where stories of 'genuine niggers' in every variety of costume' formed a staple image in the public mind. Minstrel shows also repeatedly referred to slavery or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.²² The public understanding of chattel slavery was inextricably linked to the continuing success of Stowe's novel, and its multiple theatrical interpretations which explicitly endorsed a virulent brand of white racism.²³ Josiah Henson's lecturing tour in 1876-1877 is a case in point. Henson – author, preacher, orator, soldier and community activist – published an edited version of his narrative in 1877 during a visit to

Britain, to help pay off the debt on his farm and which had accumulated due to his community activism work in Canada. Popularly regarded as the inspiration behind the character of ‘Uncle Tom’ in Stowe’s 1852 novel, Henson sought out remaining white abolitionist friends and new connections to exploit this association, pay off his debts and remind British audiences that the plantation house was a brutal, rather than romantic, institution.²⁴ Henson’s relationship with white social reformer and newspaper editor John Lobb proved useful, as the latter republished (and re-edited) Henson’s slave narrative, which became a phenomenal success. Together with a *Young People’s Illustrated Edition* of Henson’s narrative, over 250,000 copies of Henson’s works were sold.²⁵ To put this into perspective, Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* sold 13,000 copies in Britain between 1845-1847, and William Wells Brown sold over 12,000 copies in the early 1850s.²⁶

Henson’s tour, however, represented a unique case in the history of postbellum transatlantic activism. Most African American lecturing tours after 1865 were small and localized affairs that received moderate coverage in the Victorian press. In contrast to the antebellum period, African Americans who lectured and published narratives after 1865 often encountered an apathetic climate in the British Isles. Reverend J. Sella Martin noticed this change and was deeply concerned about what it might mean for future activists who sought support for African American rights. Martin, who began lecturing as an antislavery activist in 1857, had previously visited the British Isles in 1861 to agitate against U.S. slavery and raise support for the Union cause during the American Civil War. In 1866, Martin returned to Britain to raise money on behalf of Freedmen Aid societies.²⁷ In this tour, however, Martin criticized the British for ‘the diminution of the anti-slavery feeling in the country’. In searing language, Martin targeted Britons for continuing to ‘enjoy the blessings and comforts produced by the slaves – they had continued to use the rice, the sugar and the cotton which

was grown in the negroes' blood and watered by his tears'.²⁸ Martin deliberately used language to rhetorical effect in a way that would wound British pride and patriotism by criticizing their lack of compassion for black Americans. The wealth of English cities and towns was built on the 'blood' of enslaved individuals, and his language was urgent and calculated in order to awaken British morality to the obvious ignorance that the nation relied on slave labour.

Despite this ever-present depressing reality as denounced by Martin, African Americans who travelled to Britain with a specific mission were often able to raise the support they desired, particularly if their motive was religious. As Andrews notes, religious post-war authors wrote of their 'communal effort to realize in concrete form – a church, most often – the ideal of freedom articulated by the prophets of change in the antebellum slave narrative'.²⁹ While specifically referring to the U.S. context, this approach can be applied to Lewis Smith, an orator and author who began a lecturing tour in 1870 'with the view of raising funds on behalf of a new church and school for freedmen in America'. Supported by George Thompson, Smith related his experience in slavery and his last visit to Britain a decade earlier, in which he and another formerly enslaved man, Tabb Gross, successfully raised over \$5,000 to free Smith's wife and children from slavery. Smith returned to the U.S. and settled in Ripley, Ohio, but during the Civil War, the church and the school-house were 'maliciously destroyed'. Smith returned to Britain to raise money for the new buildings, and required £1,000, £300 of which had already been raised.³⁰ The following year in 1871, Lewis Smith published *The Self-Ransomed Slave: A Biographical Sketch of Lewis Smith*, with a foreword by George Thompson. Smith organized the publication of his *Narrative* to raise funds for the church, but the text itself was written by his amanuensis Jacob Odgers.³¹

Newspaper coverage of such localized tours like Smith's fluctuated, perhaps reflecting the general interest – or lack thereof – regarding certain missions. There are few

references, for instance, to Reverend J.C. Price, who only seems to appear for a few months in the autumn of 1881. Price lectured on religion and temperance to crowded audiences along the south coast, in aid of the Zion Wesley Institute at Concord, North Carolina. He relayed how African Americans were ‘making material progress in educational and religious life’, and ‘sang some of the hymns used by the negroes’ while donations to the church were raised.³²

Price was one of numerous African American ministers who lectured on temperance. The Reverend John Henry Hector, known as the ‘Black Knight’, delivered a temperance lecture in Southampton in 1897. The hall ‘was literally packed’, as Hector ‘drew graphic illustrations of the horrors of slavery, and compared them with the evils caused by the drink traffic’.³³ Similarly, formerly enslaved individual Reverend Isaac P. Dickerson lectured in Melksham in 1897 ‘under the auspices of the Abstainer’s Union’, speaking five nights in a row about slavery and temperance. His ‘vivid descriptions of incidents in his life proved both instructive and entertaining’, and the week was deemed a success by temperance advocates, who should expect ‘a substantial addition being made to the number of total abstainers, both old and young’.³⁴ While Price, Hector and Dickerson campaigned primarily for temperance, they constantly linked their arguments to race: African Americans were largely excluded from the general temperance movement, and the spiritual uplift of the race in general was jeopardized by alcoholic addiction. Throughout their tours, African Americans refused to let the British public lapse into thinking their obligations towards black citizens had ended: they encouraged donations from audiences, which funded temperance societies, the erection of black schools, as well as black churches.³⁵

Religious minister and temperance advocate Benjamin William Brown proved the most persistent activist in newspaper coverage from the 1880s to the early twentieth century. Born enslaved in 1841, Brown had travelled to Britain with his young family not only to

spread the gospel of temperance but also to raise support for missionaries in Africa. The 1902 edition of his narrative, *Life in Slaveland*, illustrated the horror of slavery, particularly the emotional trauma of being sold on the auction block. 'Talking about these things', Brown wrote, brought him great pain as he could 'almost hear the cries of the child, and see the silent tears of the mother, and feel the suppressed grief of her spirit. Oh, slavery is a terrible thing!'³⁶

Brown's accompanying tour aimed to remind British audiences of the terror of slavery. Brown, along with his wife and children, were nicknamed the 'singing pilgrims' and lectured and sang on the subject of 'Scenes in Slaveland'. According to one correspondent, the 'zeal and earnestness in the lecture, sweetness and enthusiasm in the singing, and such skill and precision displayed on the piano' made for an educational and entertaining evening.³⁷ Brown also spoke at Tufnell Park Congregational Church in 1888, 'under the auspices of the Biblical Institute of Baltimore...to secure the sympathy of Englishmen with the effort now being made to send coloured missionaries to Africa'.³⁸ In fact, Brown consistently delivered these lectures for various causes until at least 1903, and ensured discussions surrounding slavery, racism and segregation remained part of the cultural fabric of British society. Hence, our understanding of transnational African American lecturing tours must reflect not only their individual missions and aspirations, but also their unwillingness to allow the brutal and soul-crushing memories of slavery to fade.³⁹

Perhaps the most famous temperance lecturer, however, was Bishop Walter Hawkins. Born enslaved in Maryland in 1811, he escaped and settled in Canada to eventually become a leading Bishop within the religious community, and inspired Celestine Edwards, a Caribbean-born and British-based black activist, to pen an extensive biography of his life, which was published in England to coincide with Hawkins' lecturing tour.⁴⁰ When audiences learned of his background as a formerly enslaved individual, he was immediately asked

whether he had read Stowe's infamous novel. Hawkins challenged such comparisons by stating 'why he read [the novel] before Mrs. Stowe dreamt about it. He read it on his back, upon his head and shoulders, and into his very soul'.⁴¹ Hawkins' words reflect what historian Marcus Wood described as 'white fantasies of black lives and suffering' and its relationship with the 'cultural memory of English slavery'.⁴² Hawkins politely challenged Stowe's position as authority on the subject of slavery, and attached more importance to his own testimony because he knew from firsthand experience the true horrors of the 'peculiar institution'. Hawkins argued that Stowe, as a white American author, could never understand nor comprehend the true horrors of slavery, its legacies, or the fact it still existed. Her interpretation of slavery was sanitized and framed through a white supremacist lens, which highlighted only a mere fragment of the reality African Americans faced on a daily basis.

In doing so, Hawkins echoed generations of activists who chastised Stowe's novel for its inaccuracies. In 1855, Moses Roper declared that while Stowe's novel and other antislavery works had 'added their testimony to the truth of [my] assertions', the 'truthful detail of whose sufferings, and the wrongs and cruelties inflicted upon them, would mock the wild flights of fiction, and out-do the most romantic details of book-makers'.⁴³ Similarly, John Andrew Jackson stated in 1862 that Stowe, 'dared only allude to some of the hellish works of slavery' since it 'was too foul to sully her pen'.⁴⁴ Before and after the Civil War, African Americans often used white fiction as a springboard to correct inaccuracies and ensured that slavery and its legacies remained ever present in the popular imaginary.

By the time Hawkins was lecturing, the rise of white domestic terrorism, lynching, the convict lease system and Jim Crow laws represented the terrifying legacies of slavery, and once again stirred activists to travel abroad to maximize their message. The most famous of these tours was conducted by Ida B. Wells in 1893 and 1894.⁴⁵ Wells learned from Douglass' pioneering lecturing tour of the 1840s and introduced herself to influential reformers,

newspaper editors and aristocrats to maximize the impact and dissemination of her message. Her life-long commitment to anti-lynching thus led to extensive coverage in the transatlantic press, but also to expansive networks she could utilize to build momentum for her cause.

Wells' anti-lynching pamphlet *Southern Horrors* had been published in Britain, and she employed dissonant language to convince Britons of the brutal spectacle of lynching, shocking audiences with graphic stories of mutilation and death.⁴⁶ In 1894 in particular, the important connections Wells made gave her respectability, notoriety and, most importantly an international audience. She had the support of newspaper editors as well as religious bodies and their ministers as she urged them all to send remonstrances to their friends and brethren in the United States.⁴⁷ Wells' relentless and untiring activism ensured the legacies of slavery were forefront in the public's mind: her mission led to the formation of the Anti-Lynching Committee in London, which boasted numerous influential supporters.⁴⁸

Wells' anti-lynching tours had an extraordinary impact on the transatlantic public, but she was not the only female African American activist to traverse the Atlantic. Hallie Quinn Brown, African American activist, elocutionist and lecturer at Wilberforce College, Ohio, travelled to Britain in 1895, and lectured extensively across the British Isles for at least two years to raise money for the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Library at the College. Both Wells and Brown conducted two very successful and famous tours of Britain, made even more impressive due to Victorian racial and gender dynamics which at times complicated their activism. Both women, like Ellen Craft and Sarah Parker Remond before them, performed to the standards of white society by appearing as respectable, humble and genteel Victorian women who were pushed into activism, since there was no one else to advocate their cause. The double embodiment of gender and class threatened the ability of these women to give speeches in the public sphere, traditionally a male domain, hence the importance of securing powerful connections and testimonials to their cause.⁴⁹

Their philanthropic and antiracial crusades provided a unique counterpoint to antebellum lecturing tours, most of which were conducted by black men. Brown in particular was a virtuoso performer, and sang songs, presented readings, and lectured on lynching, the convict lease system and black disenfranchisement.⁵⁰ In a meeting in Sheffield for example, Brown described the conditions that African Americans faced in the South, ‘and the efforts which were being made to free them from the bondage in which they were still held’.⁵¹ In Edinburgh, Brown relayed how young black children were exploited within the convict lease system, providing ‘the ruling class [with] a supply of cheap convict labour’. She had also witnessed the ‘atrocities of a lynching mob’ and urged British audiences to criticize lynching and white terrorism.⁵²

Female African American activists are often invisibilised figures within transatlantic antislavery discourse. The dominant scholarship surrounding abolition is so focused on antebellum or the immediate postbellum society that both black women and men who travelled to the British Isles after 1865 are largely forgotten or ignored. The antislavery archive is incomplete without considering the voices of post-1865 activists, particularly because the legacy of slavery was a constant presence that lived with and amongst them. Only by the exorcism of such voices can we place the abolitionist movement in context and truly understand how the broken promises of abolition fueled a new generation of activists.

Scholars must also seek to rectify such silences surrounding forgotten narratives, too, such as D.E. Tobias’ 1898 pamphlet *Freed but Not Free*. Born approximately twenty-eight years before, Tobias had witnessed ‘from personal experience and observation...[that] emancipation has not made the coloured race a free people in the U.S.A’. The convict lease system was a ‘true relic and consequence of the old system of slavery with ten times its severity’. He wrote that ‘prisoners...are sold from the public auction block, just as slaves were in ante-bellum days’. While women and men were forced to show their physical fitness,

‘great crowds of people are attracted to these degrading scenes, to see human beings sold into bondage more horrible than the worse form of the old *regime* of slavery’.⁵³ To accompany his pamphlet, Tobias not only prearranged a lecturing tour but also organized – through the British government – inspections within English and Scottish prisons, to ‘make comparisons’ with the southern states.⁵⁴ ‘We want a lot of evils remedied’, he said, ‘and when I get back I shall be able to speak and write with greater authority’. Not only did Tobias ensure the legacy of slavery remained popular in the British imagination, he also used his success as a benchmark for future success in the U.S.⁵⁵

To conclude, while African American visits were more sporadic compared to the constant lecturing tours of the 1840s and 1850s, the post-1865 era witnessed tremendous efforts to champion black communities and to combat the legacies of US slavery. For black activists, the promise of emancipation had not been fulfilled. Refusing once again to allow the invisibilisation of their actions, words or voices on transatlantic soil, a new generation of black women and men travelled abroad to the British Isles to ‘speak out’ against the evils of slavery. While some were content to publish their work through memoirs or pamphlets, others such as Amanda Smith, Benjamin William Brown, Ida B. Wells, Isaac Dickerson, D.E. Tobias and Bishop Hawkins travelled to far-flung towns and villages to educate the white mainstream public about the conditions black Americans faced. Unlike many white abolitionists after the Civil War, black activists could not afford to cease their work or even draw breath, not when the very pervasive nature of racism literally strangled the life out of ordinary citizens.

Historical accounts of African Americans after the Civil War tend to privilege the fraught politics of abolition and often obscured the missions of these notorious and unrelenting activists. Yet, African Americans’ desire to share their testimony continued

beyond the parameters of what historians define as a period of abolition. At the conclusion of his revolutionary 1898 pamphlet, D.E. Tobias wrote that

...though freed, we are not yet a free people. Some of us who have had the priceless benefits of education must continue to work till the complete emancipation of the Afro-American race is a glorious reality.⁵⁶

Tobias recognized all too well that segregation, Jim Crow laws and the traumatizing and devastating consequences of white domestic terrorism plagued black communities, and devoured their potential, prospects, and often, their lives. He argued that those who were privileged enough to obtain an education should challenge white supremacy in all its brutal forms, help other communities who were less fortunate, and ultimately work towards that ‘glorious reality’ of a world without racism, a world that he – alongside numerous African American activists – believed was attainable. Writing near the turn of the twentieth century and the so-called era of ‘Civil Rights’, Tobias proved it was still necessary for countless African Americans and their allies to strike for freedom, a legacy that remains unfinished to this day.

Endnotes

¹ D.E. Tobias, *Freed, But Not Free: The Grievances of the Afro-American* (London: S.H. Burrows, 1898), 41.

² *The Liverpool Mercury Supplement*. 23 October 1846, 4.

³ Leslie A. Schwalm, 'Agonizing Groans of Mothers' and 'Slave-Scarred Veterans': The Commemoration of Slavery and Emancipation', *American Nineteenth-Century History*, 9:3, (2008), 289-298.

⁴ William L. Andrews, 'Slave Narratives, 1865-1900', in John Ernest, *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 219-220. See also Andrews, *Slave Narratives After Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵ William L. Andrews, *Slave Narratives After Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), x-xxvii.

⁶ Andrews, 'Slave Narratives, 1865-1900', 225; David Blight, *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom, Including Their Own Narratives of Emancipation*, (Orlando: Harcourt Inc, 2007); Deborah E. McDowell, 'Telling Slavery in 'Freedom's Time: Post-Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance', in Audrey Fisch, *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 150-167.

⁷ Blight, *A Slave No More*, (2007), 13-14.

⁸ These narratives include, but are not limited to: Jacob Odgers and Lewis Smith, *The Self-Ransomed Slave, A Biographical Sketch of Lewis Smith* (Redruth: N. Odgers, 1871); John Lobb and Josiah Henson, *Uncle Tom's Story of His Life* (London: John Lobb, 1877); John Lobb and Josiah Henson, *Young People's Illustrated Edition of the Story of Uncle Tom* (London: John Lobb, 1877); James Johnson, *The Life of the Late James Johnson* (Oldham,

1877?); Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (London: John Lobb, 1881); Peter Stanford, *From Bondage to Liberty: Being the Life Story of the Rev. P.T. Stanford*, (Smethwick, 1889); Celestine Edwards, *From Slavery to a Bishopric or the Life of Bishop Walter Hawkins* (London: John Kensit, 1891); Thomas L. Johnson, *Africa for Christ: Twenty-Eight Years A Slave* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1892); Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography, The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Coloured Evangelist* (London: Hodder & Staughton, 1894); D.E. Tobias, *Freed but Not Free* (London: S.H. Burrows, 1898); Benjamin William Brown, *Life in Slaveland* (Burnley: Nuttall and Co., 1902), and Thomas L. Johnson, *Twenty-Eight Years a Slave or the Story of My Life in Three Continents* (London: W. Mate & Sons, 1909). Few scholars have traced these postbellum visits, but Jan Marsh in "From Slave Cabin to Windsor Castle: Josiah Henson and 'Uncle Tom' in Britain," *19th Century Studies* 16, (2002), 37-50 and Marcus Wood's *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) cover part of Henson's trips. Celeste-Marie Bernier and Robert Levine have also written extensively on Frederick Douglass' 1880s autobiography: Levine, *The Lives of Frederick Douglass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), and Bernier, "His Complete History"? Revisioning, Recreating and Reimagining Multiple Lives in Frederick Douglass's *Life and Times*", *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:4 (2011), 595-610.

⁹ Most scholarly works of transatlantic abolition end in 1865, including Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Richard Blackett's *Building an Antislavery Wall* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Peter Ripley's *The Black Abolitionist Papers Vol. 1, The British Isles: 1830-1865*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1985); and Audrey Fisch's, *American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Clare Taylor's book, *British and American Abolitionists:*

An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974) extends to 1870.

¹⁰ *Western Mail* (Cardiff). 8 January 1870, 7.

¹¹ *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*. 1 November 1870, 8.

¹² *Carlisle Express and Examiner*, 3 August 1878, 6; *The Englishwoman's Review*. Issue 184. 15 September 1888, 408.

¹³ *London Daily News*, 19 October 1886, 6.

¹⁴ Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers Volume 1: The British Isles, 1830-1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 18-25.

¹⁵ *The Western Times*. 6 August 1891, 3.

¹⁶ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, (2016), 340-341. For more on the 'cordon' and 'liberating sojourn' metaphors, see Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall* (1983); Rice and Crawford, *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (1999) and Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass in the Atlantic World*, (2007).

¹⁷ My forthcoming book *To Tell The Truth: African American Activism in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) will explore these themes in more depth. See also Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, (2000); Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall* (1983); Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, (2016); Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, (1985); Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (2007); Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding*, (1974), and Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford, *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (1999).

¹⁸ Fisch, *American Slaves*, (2000), 52-54. See also Ernest, 'Introduction', in Ernest, *Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative* (2014), 1-18, and Robert Stepto, *From*

Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Rice and Crawford, *Liberating Sojourn*, (1999), and Murray, *To Tell The Truth: African American Activism in the British Isles* (2020).

²⁰ Julie Roy Jeffrey. *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies & the Unfinished Work of Emancipation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 67.

²¹ Schwalm, 'Agonizing Groans of Mothers', (2008), 289-295

²² *Manchester Times*. 8 January 1876, 14; *The Morning Post*. 6 September 1883, 6. See also *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*. 21 March 1878, 3, and music sheets such as 'The Darkie's Wedding', by J.P. Harrington (London: B. Mocatta & Co., 1895, British Library H.3602.a(11.)) In the U.S., abolitionists challenged the Lost Cause narrative and the public fascination with southern plantation life: see Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies & the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (2008); Stephen G. Hall, 'To Render the Private Public: William Still and the Selling of the "The Underground Rail Road"', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 127:1 (January 2003), 35-55.

²³ Denise Kohn, Sarah Meer and Emily B. Todd, 'Introduction', in Kohn, Meer, and Todd ed., *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), xi-xxi.

²⁴ John Lobb, *Talks with the Dead: Luminous Rays from the Unseen World, Illustrated with Spirit Photographs* (London: John Lobb, 1907), 2. See also Adena Spingarn's *Uncle Tom: From Martyr to Traitor* (2018).

²⁵ Jared A. Brock, *The Road to Dawn: Josiah Henson and the Story That Sparked the Civil War* (Public Affairs: New York, 2018), 233-238. Henson had a complicated relationship with 'Uncle Tom', and often rejected the epithet in public meetings. See Marsh (2002) and Murray (2020).

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- ²⁶ Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 33-34.
- ²⁷ Richard Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: the Lives of Six Nineteenth Century Afro-Americans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 189-203; 211-213; 226-240.
- ²⁸ *The Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*. 16 February 1867, 8.
- ²⁹ Andrews, 'Slave Narratives, 1865-1900', 219-221.
- ³⁰ *The Leeds Mercury*. 14 April 1870, 4.
- ³¹ Lewis Smith and Jacob Odgers, *The Self-Ransomed Slave: A Biographical Sketch of Lewis Smith* (Redruth: N. Odgers, 1871).
- ³² *The Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*. 1 October 1881, 3.
- ³³ *The Hampshire Advertiser County*. 25 September 1897, 6.
- ³⁴ *The Wiltshire Times*. 20 November 1897, 5.
- ³⁵ *The Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*. 1 October 1881, 3.
- ³⁶ Benjamin William Brown, *Life in Slaveland* (Burnley: Nuttall and Co., 1902), 4-7; 20-21.
- ³⁷ *The North Devon Journal*. 20 October 1881, 8.
- ³⁸ *The Islington Gazette*. 22 August 1888, 3.
- ³⁹ *The Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter*. 4 December 1885, 5; *The Thetford and Watton Times*. 16 January 1892, 5; *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*. 3 November 1894, 8; *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*. 9 January 1897, 7; *The Burnley Gazette*. 27 February 1901, 2.
- ⁴⁰ See Edwards, *From Slavery to a Bishopric, or, The Life of Bishop Walter Hawkins of the British Methodist Episcopal Church, Canada*, (London: John Kensit, 1891).
- ⁴¹ *The Western Times*. 6 August 1891, 3.
- ⁴² Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21.

⁴³ *Hereford Times*. 4 August 1855, 9.

⁴⁴ John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), iii.

⁴⁵ See Linda McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Sarah Sikley, *Black Woman Reformer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ McMurry, (1998), 186-187; 190, 216.

⁴⁷ *Liverpool Mercury*. 15 June 1894, 5.

⁴⁸ *Daily Inter Ocean*, 7 July 1894.

⁴⁹ Sarah Sikley, *Black Woman Reformer*. (2015), 55-57; 75-80.

⁵⁰ *The Edinburgh Evening News*. 16 January 1896, 2.

⁵¹ *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*. 27 February 1895, 6.

⁵² *The Edinburgh Evening News*. 14 January 1896, 4.

⁵³ Tobias, (1898), 7-8; 12; 25-29; 37-39.

⁵⁴ *Western Mail*. 7 November 1899, 6.

⁵⁵ *Western Mail*. 7 November 1899, 6.

⁵⁶ Tobias, (1898), 60-61.